



Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

April 17, 2003

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a serious respiratory illness, that appears to be caused by a newly identified virus. Since Mid-February, the World Health Organization has been investigating outbreaks of SARS in Hanoi, Vietnam, Singapore, and in Hong Kong and the mainland province of Guangdong in the Peoples' Republic of China. Canada, especially the city of Toronto has also been hard hit by SARS. Suspect cases have now been reported in most countries, including the United States.

Q: What is happening in Utah?

Utah has five suspect cases of SARS. All of the cases had recently traveled to mainland China, Hong Kong, Philippines, or Taiwan. There have been no new cases identified since March.

Q: What is Public Health doing to protect people in Utah from catching SARS?

Public Health is regularly contacting healthcare providers to inform them about the signs and symptoms of SARS. Public Health is following up on all reports of sick individuals to help determine if they might have SARS. Any individual who is suspected of having SARS is carefully questioned to identify all close contacts. A close contact would be someone that they live with or a health care provider. Then, Public Health calls all contacts to inform them that they may have been exposed to SARS. Those contacts are asked to remain at home until we are certain that they do not have the disease.

Q: Why don't we quarantine everyone who has traveled to Asia?

- 1: Very few people who travel to Asia come into contact with this disease.
- 2: Healthy people are not infectious, they are not carriers, and you cannot become sick by being near a healthy person.
3. Everyone who returns to the U.S. from affected parts of Asia is given instructions to contact their healthcare provider if they become ill.
4. No one in the U.S. has become ill from casual contact with a SARS patient.

This means that schoolmates and coworkers are NOT considered to be at high risk even if a traveler does become ill. Nevertheless, Public Health is looking for evidence of transmission from these types of exposures. In some cases, Public

Health may work with schools or worksites to make sure we prevent any chance of spread in these settings.

Q: Will I catch SARS from a person who recently traveled to Asia?

You cannot catch SARS from a healthy person. There is no reason to avoid healthy individuals who have recently traveled to Asia.

Q: I just returned from Asia. Do I need a doctor's note to return to work or school.

No. If you are healthy, there is no reason for you to avoid any normal activities. If you develop a fever or cough, do not go to school or work. Be sure to visit your health care provider promptly. Please call ahead so that your doctor can give you instructions to make sure you don't expose anybody at the office or clinic.

Q: I am very worried about catching SARS.

Diseases can be very scary. But you should put this disease into perspective. Every year, nearly 1,000,000 people die from disorders related to smoking, and poor eating and exercise habits. About 16,000 die from Influenza. And so far there have been no deaths from SARS in the US. It makes more sense to focus on health risks that are more likely to affect you and ones you can prevent – Regular exercise, not smoking, eating right, and wearing seatbelts or bicycle/motorcycle helmets are examples.

Q: How does someone catch SARS?

It appears to spread through close contact, such as between family members or between patient and doctor. It is probably spread through coughing, sneezing, and other contact with nasal fluids. No one in the US has caught SARS through casual contact, such as from schoolmates or coworkers; some casual transmission has apparently occurred elsewhere in the world, so Utah Public Health remains alert to that possibility.

Q: What causes it?

It appears to be caused by a relative of the virus that causes the common cold. That virus is called a "coronavirus", which refers to the way it looks under an electron microscope. While scientists, doctors and public health officials have many questions left to answer, the rapid identification of the causal agent – in a matter of weeks - is cause for optimism.

Q: What should I do if I suspect I have SARS?

First, if you have not traveled to Asia in the past 10 days, or lived with or cared for someone who is ill with SARS, then you are not likely to have SARS. If you have traveled to Asia in the past 10 days, and currently have a high fever and/or flu-like symptoms, you should see a doctor as soon as possible. Remember to tell the doctor about your recent travel and call ahead to tell them about your concern.

Q: How quickly can someone get the disease after being exposed to it?

One to ten days (average of 4 days).

Q. What can I do to prevent the spread of SARS?

Careful hand washing with soap and water can help reduce the spread of respiratory illness including influenza and the common cold. Wash your hands after sneezing, coughing, blowing your nose, etc.

Q: What are the symptoms?

A fever over 100.4 degrees which lasts for several days, coughing, and shortness of breath. Other possible symptoms include headache, muscular stiffness, loss of appetite, confusion, rash, and diarrhea.

Q: Are there any cases of SARS in the United States?

There are roughly 200 cases of SARS in the United States. No one has died from SARS in the U.S.

Q: What are the chances of recovering from SARS?

In the United States, no one has died from SARS. In the rest of the world, about 3% of cases are fatal.

Q: Is it dangerous to travel to Asia? Should I cancel my trip?

Here are the opinions of two highly respected health organizations.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is advising that people traveling to Hong Kong or Guangdong Province China consider postponing all but essential travel. WHO does not consider that the small health risk attributable to SARS significantly increases the health risk associated with travel to any other destination.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) advises postponing nonessential travel to mainland China, Hong Kong, Hanoi, Vietnam, or Singapore until further notice.

Q: What should I do if I have recently traveled to a country where cases of SARS have been reported?

You should monitor your own health for 10 days after your return. If you become ill with a fever of over 100.4°F [$>38.0^{\circ}\text{C}$] that is accompanied by a cough or difficulty breathing or that progresses to a cough and/or difficulty breathing, you should consult a health care provider. To help your health care provider make a diagnosis, tell him or her about any recent travel to regions where cases of SARS have been reported and whether you were in contact with someone who had these symptoms.

Please visit www.cdc.gov, www.who.int, contact your Local Health Department, or the Utah Department of Health, Office of Epidemiology at (801) 538-6191 if you want more information.